

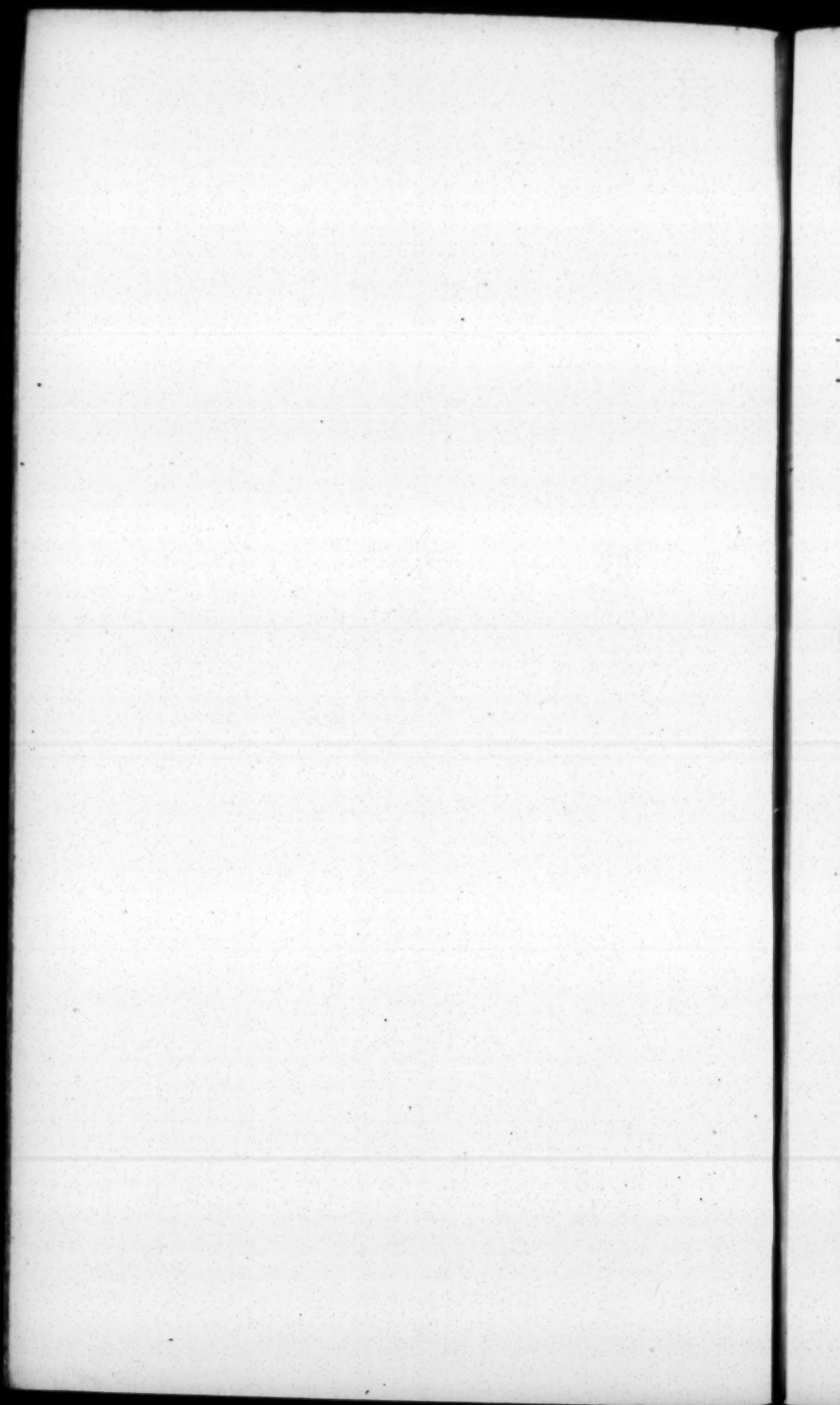
6

A N
E X T R A C T
FROM A
DISCOURSE
ON
P R A Y E R.

By Mr. De FENELON,
Archbishop of CAMBRAY.



D U B L I N:
Printed for WILLIAM WATSON, Bookfeller, at the
Poets Head in Caple-street.
MDCCCLIX.



A N

E X T R A C T

F R O M A

DISCOURSE on PRAYER.

OF all the Duties of Christian Piety there is not one more neglected, or more essentially necessary than Prayer, which draws down God's Grace into us.

The Generality of People only consider this Exercise of Piety, as a Sort of tiresome Ceremony, which it is excusable to abridge as much as possible. Thus, this Key to Heaven and Perfection, is despised and neglected, even by those who have the most pressing Occasion for it, therewith to appease Almighty God: And even amongst those whose Profession it is to Pray, this Duty is often performed with such Coldness, Indifference, Disgust, and Dissipation of Mind, that their Prayers very far from being a Source of Blessings and Graces to them, often become the Reverse, a Cause of their greater Condemnation.

What is become of the grateful Zeal of the first Christians? Who interrupted their Sleep to praise the Giver of Life. Confused at their Example, let us endeavour to animate our Faith and Love, almost extinct.

Consider that our Salvation depends on the Grace we receive, and that Grace, on our Prayers to obtain it ; so that our Salvation will be decided by our Manner of praying, and the Fidelity with which we obey the Impressions of the Spirit of God, for without him we can do nothing : Now Grace is only obtained by Prayer, Fervour is only excited, and maintained by Prayer, a Soul then, which hath little Fervour, should consider the Use of Prayer as the Means to which God annexes the Graces necessary to it's Salvation.

We must Pray ; it is an indispensable Duty to all Christians.

We must Pray, because no one can perform the Duties of their Station without it.

We must Pray, because our Salvation depends upon our manner of Praying. God only can instruct us in the full Extent of our Duties : The Instruction of Men, however wise, and well-intentioned they may be, are found weak and imperfect, if God doth not add that inward Light, mentioned by St. *Paul*, which subjects the Mind to Truth : The Defects that appear in all Men, prejudices us against the Truths they teach. Such is our Weakness, that we do not receive with Respect and Docility, Instructions from Men as imperfect as we are ; a thousand Suspicions, Fears and Interests, prevent our profiting by what Men would teach us, even when they have Authority and Intention to tell us the most important Truths ; still what they do, weakens what they say : In a Word, God only can instruct us perfectly, and if you sincerely desire it, you will meet with true Wisdom ; God will teach you. Not only careless Sinners, but even regular Christians, will not find in themselves the true Motives for Action which is necessary to their Salvation, be their Understandings ever so good, for of our own
Fund

Fund we have only Sin and Falshood; Truth and Righteousness are borrowed Goods in us, which only flow from the divine Fountain. Oh! that we had an ardent Thirst for them, in the frightful Desert of this World, that being refreshed with this celestial Dew, we faint not by the Way, which leads to our most happy Country from whence we are strayed; all other Treasures which your Heart seeketh for will only encrease its Void. Know that you will be forever Poor if you do not possess the only Treasure which can enrich you; for your Heart is so formed as never to be satisfied with less than Infinity: All Light which doth not come from God, will only dazzle, and not light you thro' the dangerous Paths, amidst the Precipices which surround us. Our Experience and Reflection can not give us, upon all Occasions, just and certain Rules. The Councils of the wisest and most sincere of our Friends will never be enough so, to redress our Sentiments, and Conduct; a thousand Things will escape their Notice, and a thousand others which have not escaped them, will seem too strong to tell us; they will suppress them, or at least they will only insinuate the least Part of them; our Faults will sometimes exceed the Bounds of the Zeal of our Friends for us, or of our Confidence in them: Even the Criticism of our Enemies, vigilant and severe as it is, can not extend so far as to undeceive us in relation to ourselves; their Malignity only brightens the Flame of self Love, which is so blind that it contrives to make us pleased with ourselves, when we please no one else. What must we conclude in the midst of so much Darkeness? That it only appertains to God to dissipate it; that he only is the unspotted and infallible Master; that we must consult him, and he will

teach us, if we faithfully invoke him, all that Men dare not say to us, all that Books can only teach us in a vague and confused Manner ; in short, all that we need know, and which we never can teach ourselves. We may conclude with Certainty, that the greatest Obstacle to true Wisdom, is the Presumption which is inspired by false Wisdom ; That the first Step towards this precious Wisdom is to desire it, to feel the Want of it, and to be convinced that we must ask it of the Father of Lights, who giveth to all Men liberally who ask it faithfully : But if it be true that God only can enlighten us, it is as certain that he will not do so, if we do not engage him to it, by asking this Grace of him. It is true that God often prevents us with the first of all Gifts, which is Faith, when he calls us to be Christians ; but he wills, and it is just that we, on our Side, should take care to prevent him, for all the other Favours which he will confer on us in the whole Course of our Lives. His Mercy prepares them for us, but least they should be thrown away, he waits untill we wish for them ; that is to say, till we are worthy of them, by our earnestness in requesting them of him.

Is not this Just ? Can we complain of this Dispensation of God's Favours ? He will give us his Riches, but he will only give them to those who ask them, lest he should give them to those who do not desire them.

Are we not exquisitely happy when so great a good is in our Power if we wish for it ? Can it cost less than a Wish ? Real Happiness is obtained without the least Degree of that anxious Care which is requisite in order to obtain false Happiness. What do we not undertake and suffer in the World, and often unsuccessfully, for
despicable

despicable and dangerous Things which we should be happy never to enjoy? It is not so with the Gifts of Heaven, they are as invaluable as certain to those who really desire them. Are we then to be surprized, that the whole Life of a Christian is a continual Tendency of the Heart to God? Our Happiness only consists in this Thirst after Righteousness; this Desire is a Prayer. If you desire without ceasing this Righteousness, you pray without ceasing, which no more excludes vocal Prayer and Attendance upon God's publick Worship, than a Principle of Honesty excludes honest Actions, of which it is the Cause and Life. By attending on his publick Worship, *You let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven;* You obey his Command of not neglecting the assembling of yourselves together, and you obtain his Grace in a peculiar Manner; for he hath promised, *Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them.* And in his House you receive his highest Means of Grace, for *whosoever eateth the Flesh of the Son of God, and drinketh his Blood, hath eternal Life in him.*

Do not suppose that you must always necessarily pronounce a long Train of Words, and give yourself much Trouble to pray to God; to live in Prayer, is to desire that his Will may be done; it is to form some good Desire, to elevate our Hearts to God, it is to long for the Happiness he promises, to be shocked at the View of our past Sins and Miseries, and the Danger we are still in of displeasing him by violating his Laws of Perfection: Now, this Prayer requires neither Science, Method, nor Reasoning, it is not to be a Work of the Head, it requires but an Instant of Time, and a good Motion

tion of our Hearts, one may pray without any distinct Thought; it requires only a Return of our Hearts for a Moment, and even that Moment may be employed in something else, so great is the Condescension of God to our Weakness, that he permits us, if there be Occasion, to divide this Moment betwixt him and his Creatures. Yes, in this Moment, if it be absolutely necessary, employ yourself in your Business; it is sufficient that you offer it to God, or that you Act with a general Intention to glorify him in the commonest Actions of your Life; thus we fulfill the Command of *Whether we Eat or Drink, or whatsoever we do, let us do it to the Glory of God.* It is this Prayer without Interruption which St. Paul requires, when he commands us to *Pray without ceasing*, a Prayer whose very Name startles nominal Christians; for whom it is a sad Penance to speak to God, or think of him: It is a Prayer which many pious People suppose impracticable, but which, however, will be very easy to those who know, that the best of all Prayers is to act always with a pure Intention, desiring to do every Thing according to God's Commands, and for his Sake. And what is there so troublesome or restraining in this Law of Prayer since it may be reduced to an acquired Habit of acting freely and gayly in common Life, to obtain Salvation at the End of this Life, and please our Sovereign Master! Men of the World, who apply themselves to make a Fortune, never take it into their Heads to complain of the Restraint of attending to their Interest; and to seek continually the Means of pleasing their Prince, is it not habitual to them? and a Habit that they love? Were we as sensible to eternal Salvation, and the Happiness of being agreeable to God, should we consider an habitual Acting in all Things

Things for him as a vexatious Constraint? On the contrary, would not this Habit animate and support us under the Temptations, and Calamities of Life.

Is it too much to expect from Man that he should ask of his Father what he cannot find of himself? Prayer is a Sort of begging, we ask of infinite Love a spiritual Alms, and Prayer moves his Compassion towards us; to this Purpose his Spirit prays *in*, and *for us*, with Sighs ineffable; to this Purpose those who have received the first Fruits of the Spirit, sigh for the compleat Adoption, when the Body and Soul shall be restored to Perfection. The Apostle saith that the whole Creation groaneth and travaileth to be delivered from it's present State of Vanity; and shall we be the only Part of it insensible to our Misery? Dare we hope that God will give us Favours which we disdain to ask of him? We may impute to ourselves the ill Success of our past Resolutions, he that will not have recourse to Prayer, which is the Canal of Graces; rejects those Graces. We may certainly conclude, that it is our neglect of Prayer which is the Cause of our being justly punished, with a Disgust to Piety, and violent Temptations, so much Weakness to execute what we promise to God, such Inconstancy in our Sentiments, such Frailty upon all Occasions, when we are to despise the Judgments and Censures of the World, or conquer our own Passions in order to enter into the perfect Liberty of the Sons of God.

But the most terrible of all Calamities is, that when we neglect to depend upon God, he leaves us to ourselves: On the other Hand, he exhorts us to try by Experience, how gracious the Lord is. He has pleased to make the Law of Prayer reciprocal betwixt Man and himself, as Man is bound.

bound to Pray so has he graciously bound himself to hear. “ *Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you* ; these are thy Words, O God ! And shall we doubt the Promises made by Truth itself ? Can we believe these Promises and neglect Prayer, or sink under Cares and Misfortunes like those who know not that God is tenderly sensible to every Distress, Want and Care of his Creatures, who depend on him.

The Prayer of *Cornelius* the Centurion ascended as a pleasing Perfume before the Throne of God.

Jeshua prayed with Confidence, and at the Voice of a Man, the Course of the Light from the Sun was stopped. It is our own Faults if our Prayers are not as powerful, as efficacious, as theirs were ; not to perform Prodigies, which commanded Nature, but for a no less supernatural Work : The entire Change of our Hearts, in a Will submissive to God’s upon all Occasions, which is the Perfection of Religion. Let us believe and hope as those Saints did ; and we shall receive as they did.

How many Christians do we see alienated from the Life of God, who scarce ever think of him, who don’t know what it is to open their Hearts to him, to expose their Wants and Weakness to him, who seek every where else for Council and Comfort from false Wisdom, and dangerous Amusements ; who cannot persuade themselves to seek from God by an humble Prayer, the Remedy to their Wants ; the exact Knowledge of their Defects ; necessary Strength to conquer their vicious Inclinations ; and the Consolation necessary, not to be discouraged with the Temptations and Distresses which we must meet with even in what is called a regular and happy Life. Till we live in the Spirit of Prayer, which is *praying without ceasing*,
we

we cannot be happy in the most prosperous State of Life : when we do so, we cannot be miserable in the most distressed, for it is impossible to have those Unneasinesses, Doubts and Fears for Futurity which People have, who know not God. When we are governed and protected by God's Spirit, it is Love that prays in us, and he who inspires that Love, will not be deaf to the Requests which he forms : Since he only gives us a Desire to request his Graces in order to pour them on us with Godlike Liberality. Can we fear then, that he will refuse, what he only waits till we ask for, his Desire is to give us all the Happiness our Nature is capable of.

Perhaps you will say, I have no Attraction or Taste for Prayer, I am tired and not touched with it, my Imagination accustomed to sensible and agreeable Objects, wanders in spite of me.

I will suppose that this may be your Case, that neither a Veneration for the great Truths of Religion, nor the Majesty of God present, nor the Interest of your Salvation, can fix your rambling Mind in Prayer, and render it attentive, but agree with me in condemning your Infidelity, be out of Countenance at your childish Weakness, wish that you had a better Understanding, and a more manly Mind. Fear not to tire yourself with Prayer, it will soon change your Disposition ; you will like what you formerly hated, and hate what you formerly loved : But of all Dangers, beware of a fatal Inapplication of the Mind to God ; try how Gracious he is, and you will soon experience a Joy which the World can neither give or take away.

Which

[12]

Which that we may all Experience, let us
pray from our Hearts to God, who is Love,
that he may grant, through the Merits and
Intercession of our R E D E E M E R, J E S U S
C H R I S T.

The E N D.

